



Executive Summary

In October, the Governor's Office of Early Childhood (GOEC) continued its efforts to improve the quality of early learning for Kentucky's youngest citizens by submitting a four-year Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge proposal to the U.S. Department of Education. The proposal, which requests \$45 million, builds upon the ongoing work of the GOEC and our Early Childhood Advisory Council, and Kentucky's history of putting our most vulnerable children and families first.

Totaling more than 1,000 pages, the Kentucky All★STARS proposal compares and contrasts Kentucky's current Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System for early learning and development programs and its impact (or lack thereof) on a fictitious family. Simply put, we bring home the daily realities of all low-income families through the ongoing challenges for Connie Johnson and her children Maya (4 years old) and Knox (2 years old), as well as the challenges of Anita Beckham, their early learning and development program operator. Proposal sections reflect their practical thinking to better demonstrate specific areas of improvement to be addressed through Kentucky All★STARS.

The proposal, submitted on October 18, 2013, is one of 17 submitted nationally; 3-8 proposals will be awarded in early December. Kentucky All★STARS includes four critical components, which are outlined on the following pages.

- **Component #1: An expanded quality rating system.** We propose a shift from an optional to a mandatory quality rating system that will ensure all private and public early learning and development programs meet a minimum level of quality and continue to improve annually.
- **Component #2: Supports for families.** Two enhanced family engagement strategies will be supported through local partnerships and will help all families with young children build their capacity to support their child's early development.
- **Component #3: A responsive professional development system.** We will integrate existing and expanded professional development opportunities by targeting specific improvement strategies as identified in our quality rating system.
- **Component #4: Improved and linked data systems.** Existing data systems will be linked through the Kentucky Longitudinal Data System to provide agencies the information they need to improve their services for young children and their families.



Background: Kentucky's focus on early childhood

Kentucky All★STARS is an expansion of existing work in the Commonwealth to ensure all children have access to high-quality early learning and development programs, regardless of where each child lives, his/her family characteristics, or the family's knowledge of early learning and development. In 1999, Governor Paul Patton recognized that the quality of early learning and development experiences for our youngest children are directly related to the future economic development of Kentucky and established the Governor's Early Childhood Task Force. The work of the Task Force resulted in a recommended 20-year plan that was embraced by Governor Patton and implemented through the integrated actions of multiple Kentucky agencies, partners and stakeholder groups. This 20-year plan, which resulted in the KIDS NOW legislation, a whole-child approach to early learning and development, was approved in 2000 by a unanimous vote of both houses of the Kentucky General Assembly.



The four key areas of focus in the 20-year plan, which have been upheld through two decades and championed by Governor Steve Beshear, include:

- Assuring Maternal and Child Health
- Supporting Families
- Enhancing Early Care and Education
- Establishing the Support Structure

These four areas continue to be areas for funding and policy supports in Governor Beshear's second term; in fact, early learning and development for children is one of the Governor's Top 5 Priorities. Just two years ago, Governor Beshear formed the Governor's Office of Early Childhood (GOEC), an executive-level division dedicated to policies and practices for early childhood and development. The GOEC was charged with the continuing expansion of KIDS NOW and will be charged with the administration of Kentucky's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Proposal, if Kentucky wins.



Component #1: An expanded quality rating system

Kentucky currently has a voluntary rating system for early learning and development programs, and 40 percent of eligible programs participate. This participation rate along with various standards for quality confuse the decision-making process for families. If young children are eligible, families must try to determine which setting is best, based on three different sets of quality indicators. Even the most savvy of parents would struggle to do so under the current system.

Therefore, we have determined that in order for our rating system to be meaningful for parents, it must first apply to all programs, and second, the rating system must be clear, visible and easily understood. Requiring programs to display a quality rating will give every parent an objective way to assess the relative quality of that program. For example, all restaurants are now required to post in their window in a specific and visible location their most recent rating by the health department. While a high enough rating may not make a consumer change his/her mind about whether to walk in for a juicy burger, a low rating will certainly cause one to consider other options. Likewise, families will begin to notice, suddenly becoming aware their children attend early learning and development programs with a low STAR rating (< 3 Stars). That is our rationale, as further demonstrated in the following if / then statement:

Our rationale



If... we require all early learning and development programs to participate in a family-friendly, high-quality rating system with unmistakable levels of quality,

and... we directly support early childhood educators, providing them the ongoing coaching and support they need to improve the quality of their programs,

then... we will see an increase in the number of children – especially Children with High Needs – who have access to and participate in high-quality early learning programs,

which will... result in an increase in the number of children who are kindergarten ready.

Through Kentucky All★STARS, we will shift the current system from optional to mandatory for all public preschool, Head Start, and early learning and development programs, ensuring each program with two or more non-related children 1) meets a minimum level of quality and 2)



continues to improve annually via a customized path to improvement. This will be accomplished through a year-long redesign of the STARS levels and plans to link our expanded TQRIS system to licensing requirements. We take this step – to mandate participation in the STARS system – because our history indicates wholesale changes are more fully effected when they are the new norm, not just something good to do.

Therefore, by 2016, all providers in the Commonwealth will qualify through the redesigned STARS system. In addition, STARS will encourage each program to participate in ongoing improvement strategies to reach the next level of quality by providing professional development, ongoing coaching and other supports. By eliminating the voluntary nature of the current rating system and redesigning the STARS levels to reflect the individual quality measures already used by our three types of programs, we will dramatically increase the number of programs in the rating system by 2017, going from 899 programs in 2012 to an estimated 3663. This will also dramatically increase the number of Children with High Needs being served in high-quality early learning and development programs. By ensuring that more children, especially those Children with High Needs, are in high-quality early learning and development programs, which have been proven to increase a variety of positive outcomes, we ensure an increase in the number of children who are kindergarten ready.

Component #2: Supports for families

Through Kentucky All★STARS, we will implement two new strategies statewide to help families better understand the needs of their young child. Both are research-based and have a history of producing positive results for low-income families.

- **Strengthening Families Approach and the Protective Factors Framework**

We will adopt the Strengthening Families strength-based framework of Protective Factors throughout public and private systems and support networks, working with more than a dozen partners and stakeholder groups for full implementation. The five protective factors – Parent Resilience, Social Connections, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Concrete Supports in Times of Need, and Social and Emotional Competence of Children – build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development.



Strengthening Families will help **connect available resource providers** to parents in need – as seen through the eyes of those early childhood educators each day. Personnel in our early learning and development programs will learn to be intentional in facilitating friendships with parents and recognize signs of family stress as they care for each family’s children. They will reduce the social isolation some parents feel and help develop within the community a set of positive parenting norms.

The GOEC will work with a myriad of partners to integrate the framework not only in the Kentucky All★STARS project implementation, but in our overall work and within the work of those partner groups. Leadership Team Partners, listed below, also have agreed to integrate the framework into the services they provide. Therefore, families will receive the **supports they need at multiple levels and from multiple providers** in a seamless manner. For example, an early childhood educator, who provides a twice-a-day social connection to caregivers and parents may connect a weary first-time mom with the HANDS Home Visiting program and the Department of Maternal and Child Health; the educator may also contact one of the local Community Early Childhood Councils (CECCs) who will contact additional, local support providers for help, providing the specific support structure that particular family needs. Each of the agencies will help integrate the Protective Factors. This will create a statewide cross-sector network that conscientiously and consistently works to build the five protective factors in families, particularly families with High Needs.

Leadership Team Partners: Integrating Protective Factors

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor’s Office of Early Childhood • Department of Maternal & Child Health • Division of Protection and Permanency • Department of Behavioral Health • HANDS Home Visiting • First Steps Early Intervention (Part C of IDEA) • Division of Child Care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky • Metro United Way • Family Resources Centers (FRYSCs) • Kentucky Department of Education • Children, Inc. • Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence • Department of Public Health • Head Start State Collaboration Office |
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Each agency has agreed to integrate the Protective Factors Framework into the services they currently provide to low-income families. This will ensure **all areas** of the framework are addressed throughout the year.



- **Toyota bornlearning[®] Academies**

Toyota bornlearning[®] Academies are parent- friendly workshops for low-income families with young children, held at the local elementary school. Toyota bornlearning[®] Academies help families prepare their child for kindergarten entry by providing information about what it means to be ready for kindergarten and by offering easy-to-apply strategies to use at home in those early years. In the process, families form a relationship with the school, helping smooth the transition to kindergarten and later grades.

Toyota bornlearning[®] Academies create long-lasting relationships between families and the K-6 schoolhouse. When families are engaged in positive interactions in the school setting before school even begins, they are more likely to feel welcomed and remain engaged throughout their child's educational experience. Research shows that the earlier parent involvement in a child's educational process begins, the more powerful the effect (Cotton, 1989; Desforges, 2003).

That is the purpose of Toyota bornlearning[®] Academies: to engage families with the school system in the earliest years of their child's education by offering them strategies they can use at home to maximize their child's early learning and development. The intentional placement in a school setting allows for families and children to gain insight and a level of comfort needed to transition to that school setting. This is also an opportunity for school leaders to get to know the family and their needs – all leading to long-standing and positive parent-teacher relationships.

The Academies were inspired by The Harlem Children's Zone in New York, with the idea of creating parent workshop series for families, to set children on the right track for learning as early as possible. A curriculum, training guide and supplemental materials were developed by United Way of Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky based on existing research-based materials created by United Way Worldwide, The Ad Council and the Families and Work Institute.

The pilot Toyota bornlearning[®] Academy was implemented in Kentucky as a public-private partnership between United Way of Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky and Kenton County Schools, and experienced overwhelming success, expanding to 10 initial elementary schools. The program has been highlighted by United Way Worldwide as a best practice. In 2012, a statewide partnership, including the Governor's Office of Early



Childhood, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, and United Way of Greater Cincinnati and United Way of Kentucky cultivated and secured funding from Toyota and expanded Academies to schools in various districts statewide. Toyota has made a 5-year commitment that will result in \$1 million invested in Toyota bornlearning® Academies across the state of Kentucky, with at least 10 additional schools added each year through 2016.

Kentucky All★STARS will work with Toyota bornlearning® Academies to expand that reach to 150 or more elementary schools over 4 years. Importantly, we will utilize Family Resource & Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs), which work in every High Need elementary school in the Commonwealth, to implement the initiative. Through a gradual release model, our project staff will work with FRYSC staff to model the implementation of the Academies; the underlying intent of the state-wide expansion is the full integration into Family Resource and Youth Service Centers (FRYSC) core grant components within five years.

Both of these research-based programs, the Strengthening Families Approach and the Toyota bornlearning Academies, will enable Kentucky to ensure that families better understand early learning and development for their child.

Component #3: A responsive professional development system

Increasing the knowledge and qualifications of early learning and development professionals has been a KIDS NOW focus since the early days of the initiative. Our research supports this strategy by demonstrating a strong correlation between teacher educational attainment and children's developmental progress. In fact, according to our 2012 Early Care and Education Evaluation conducted by the University of Kentucky, "Teacher education level has consistently been associated with positive child outcomes in Kentucky's evaluation of early care and education. Administrators should support teachers to gain higher education levels and create work environments that encourage teachers to remain in the field of early care and education. Evaluation results suggest that teachers with more experience engage in teaching behaviors linked to positive child outcomes." (Grisham-Brown, 2012)

Kentucky has a broad array of professional learning opportunities including scholarships for college and non-college credit-bearing coursework; in addition, incentives are provided through the Division of Child Care support programs for hiring/supporting more educated staff. The idea



is to help early learning and development professionals continually move forward through a seamless system of learning. All early care educators are required to have 15 to 18 hours of professional development annually, depending on the type of early care program (15 hours for childcare classrooms and Head Start; 18 hours for public preschool).

As we implement Kentucky All★STARS, the Professional Development Workgroup will continue to integrate professional development offerings. Currently, half-a-dozen organizations in the state provide training to early childhood educators, but only to a single type of audience. In order to better leverage those training resources, we will provide training models or prototypes that can be delivered by multiple qualified trainers from any of our partnering agencies to any of our early learning and development professionals. For example, a Regional Training Center (RTC) that serves public preschools in Western Kentucky would also provide training to other early learning and development programs, including childcare and Head Start.

In addition to traditional paths to careers in early care and development, Kentucky has expanded the workforce pipeline by embedding requirements for state and nationally recognized credentials in public high schools: the nationally-recognized Child Development Associate credential (CDA) and a Certificate of Eligibility for Kentucky's Commonwealth Child Care Credential may both be achieved by the senior year of high school. Thousands of dollars will be saved in professional development costs as high school Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Early Childhood classes are integrated into our Early Childhood Career Lattice. FCS students will be prepared to go right to work in early childhood programs and, once employed, will be eligible for all of the system of supports, including scholarships.

As we implement Kentucky All★STARS and look to expand our workforce even further, we will also simplify/unify our Professional Development (PD) Registry. Currently, the PD Registry only captures training information on individuals working in licensed and certified childcare programs and the licensed Head Starts; data for public preschool and school-based Head Start early child educators is housed within the Kentucky Department of Education. As part of Kentucky All★STARS, we will consolidate data from the current KDE system into the expanded STARS system. This will allow individuals, employers, PD Counselors, and others to determine the qualifications of individuals, develop plans for improvement, and document staff qualifications. (i.e., staff who hold a CDA).

An expanded and comprehensive registry will also allow the GOEC to work with other state



agencies as they seek to recruit potential and existing early childhood educators to meet anticipated demand. For example, as we increase the number of early learning and development programs seeking 3 and 4 STARS ratings, we anticipate there will be a greater demand for professionalized staff members; currently, to achieve a 3 STARS rating:

- at least 50 percent of staff, including substitutes, must have a Commonwealth Child Care Credential or higher;
- the Director must receive at least 24 hours of appropriate training per year; and
- during 75 percent of program hours, the director or person responsible must have a CDA or higher.

While the STARS Redesign Workgroup will continue to clarify the requirements for each rating level as we move forward, it is clear we will need to be prepared for increased demand for credentialed early childhood educators. The unified registry will allow us to more quickly identify trends in hiring and availability of professionally-prepared educators in the workforce.

Component #4: Improved and linked data systems

Kentucky's Longitudinal Data System is housed and maintained through the Kentucky Center on Education and Workforce Statistics or KCEWS; the KLDS is Kentucky's shared repository for data – a warehouse for storing longitudinal data sets. It includes sophisticated modules for matching data across different sources with different types of identifiers, report development systems, and a data model that allows identifiable data to be stripped from the records it receives.

When, two years ago, Governor Beshear called upon the Early Childhood Advisory Council to begin developing and implementing recommendations on a data collection system for early childhood services, health services, and other programs, KCEWS had to be part of the solution. The KLDS is a malleable system that is sensitive to the federal and state privacy concerns and data requirements of individual agencies working within early childhood.

Through our RTT-ELC proposal, we have put forward a plan to create links between various data systems to the KLDS. This will provide access to the entire early learning universe; we will be building a data system for birth to work. We have secured a signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to integrate data from HANDS Home Visiting, First Steps Early Intervention program, and several child care databases including the provider database and the workforce registry. Other agreements include several



Head Start programs, who will participate in a pilot program to integrate their data, including child-level assessments. And, we are proposing to integrate public preschool data into the state's professional development registry.

Because the KLDS can match individuals across multiple data systems, it can provide a complete picture of a child over time. Specifically, the system has the ability to flag or follow children longitudinally. In our third-party evaluation, researchers from the University of Kentucky have now identified students from child care programs, Head Start, and public preschool that will be followed through their transition to kindergarten next year and beyond. The draft findings for this year examined children's progress relative to the quality of the environment and indicated children from high-quality child care programs (3 or 4 STARS), Head Start and public preschools "showed growth on most of the subscales indicating greater growth than would be expected." Through the KLDS, researchers will now follow these students beyond kindergarten to see if they maintain gains into primary and beyond. Such longitudinal data will likely prove to be critical to creating and maintaining supports for these efforts over time.

Conclusion

The Governor's Office of Early Childhood has worked with stakeholders, other government agencies, and early childhood advocates in the development and design of the 2013 Kentucky Race to the top Application, Kentucky All★STARS , Accelerating Learning Statewide through an Advanced Rating System. Together we will ensure all Kentucky children enter kindergarten Ready to Grow, Ready to Learn and Ready to Succeed.

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For more information on the Governor's Office of Early Childhood
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